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NSC BRIEFING

SOVIET LEADERSHIP

- I. There has been a new flurry of speculation that Khrushchev may be in trouble. Much of this thinking comes from an extraordinary dispatch which AP correspondent Roy Essoyan was permitted to phone out of Moscow on 6 August.
 - A. The background of this story goes like this:
 1. Essoyan wrote the dispatch beginning: "Nikita S. Khrushchev's move to put the Middle East crisis into the hands of the United Nations General Assembly marks one of the Soviet Premier's first serious diplomatic and public setbacks." The dispatch went on to say that the abandonment of the summit meeting is considered by Western diplomats as "a major retreat" and "possibly a blow to the personal fortune of the dynamic Soviet leader."
 2. After completing the article, Essoyan decided to try to phone it out--presenting his copy first to the censors. The Associated Press later reported that the phone transmission had been interrupted several times and that it was eight hours before the full story was received.
- II. Circumstances are, to say the least, unusual.
 - A. In the first place, Soviet censors normally kill any story that detracts from the standing of Soviet leaders.
 - B. Secondly, experienced Western newsmen in Moscow seldom, if ever, even attempt to clear this kind of material.
- III. However, we doubt that Khrushchev's opponents now have the upper hand and have signaled his weakness by approving the story. More likely that the AP man had been given reason to believe beforehand

that he could get the story passed; this fits in with an earlier spate of officially planted information that Khrushchev is beleaguered by Stalinists and needs all the outside support he can get.

A. This ploy probably designed soften West in summit campaign.

IV. Thus, we are rather dubious that Khrushchev has suffered a "major blow"

A. We have no good reason to believe--as some have speculated--that the army is in a position to challenge him. Similarly, we don't see any of the old group of ousted leaders--such as Molotov--able to pull a strong faction together.

V. We would not debate Ambassador Thompson's thesis, however, that Khrushchev may have lost prestige with some of his "colleagues" over the recent negotiations for a summit meeting.

A. On the one hand, there is undoubtedly pressure from part of the Soviet leadership to get the heads of government together in order to achieve some lessening of tension so that internal programs can proceed more quickly.

B. On the other hand, there are those who want to keep the pressure on the West at all costs; this might well include the Chinese leaders.

C. In such a situation, Khrushchev undoubtedly has to compromise.

VI. The impact of such a compromise on Khrushchev's personal fortunes must be weighed, however, against the success or failure of his other policies.

A. For the most part, his major domestic programs are developing in good order and the Tito-Nagy-Gomulka problem seems to be quieting down.

B. There have been very few intelligence reports recently on continuing opposition at the top and even the allegedly Stalinist

C. Khrushchev, therefore, gives the overall impression of being about as strong today as he ever was.